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DEPARTMENT FOR CA/OCS; NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/WERNER/SINGH

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TAGS: [CASC](#) [IS](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAL](#) [LE](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#)
SUBJECT: MGLE01: AOUN DISCUSSES SUMMER PLANS; PROMISES TO
HELP ON KLOTZ CASE

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey D. Feltman. Reason: Section 1.4 (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C/NF) In a July 7 meeting with the Ambassador and econoff, MP Michel Aoun was optimistic that his new television station would garner a strong audience and earn a profit. Aoun, along with his adviser Gibran Bassil, commented on Suleiman Franjieh's controversial recent statements, saying that these are part of Lebanese politics. When former President Elias Hrawi dies, Aoun said he intended to send flowers to the family and a representative to the funeral, despite their history of political conflict. Regarding the national dialogue, Aoun believed Hizballah was sincere in its pledge to keep the Blue Line quiet during Israel's military operation in Gaza. He said the status of Hizballah's arms will depend on whether the circumstances that made them necessary in the first place still existed. Aoun agreed with PM Siniora that humanitarian conditions in the Palestinian refugee camps must be improved before the army can disarm Palestinian bases. Aoun and Bassil pledged to help with the Klotz U.S. citizen child custody case. Bassil made some contacts last week with Hizballah officials, who denied any knowledge of the case. End summary.

PLANS TO SELL TV STATION
PUBLICLY; MAKE PROFIT

¶2. (C/NF) On July 7, the Ambassador and econoff met with MP Michel Aoun and his close adviser Gibran Bassil at Aoun's residence in Rabieh. Aoun opened the meeting by discussing his plans for his own television channel, "Orange Television." Aoun said that it could go on the air by the end of July. He planned to sell shares publicly in the stock market. He expected about 30 to 40 people to buy shares in his prospective television station. Aoun also anticipated his station to make a profit. When the Ambassador pointed out that no other Lebanese television stations are earning a profit (except for LBCI if one includes its satellite revenues), Aoun was optimistic about attracting advertising since he expected a big audience. Aoun said that he has had no problem with the government in getting a broadcasting license. His only obstacle to date has been financing.

VIEWS ON HARIRI-FRANJIEH,
HRAWI, AND HIZBALLAH

¶3. (C/NF) The Ambassador asked about Marada leader Suleiman

Franjieh's recent statements. Aoun laughed, saying that Franjieh must be allowed to feel he is pro-independence. When the Ambassador asked why Franjieh received Wiam Wahhab yesterday (after Wahhab's bodyguards had shot at Walid Jumblatt supporters on July 4), Aoun replied that Franjieh did so because Jumblatt had insulted him. "This is Lebanese politics," chuckled Aoun. In response to attention given to Hariri, Aoun dismissed talk that the Hariri assassination caused the Syrian withdrawal. He pointed out that he was involved, as were the U.S., France, and the United Nations, in securing the Syrian withdrawal. At most, Hariri's assassination contributed to the Syrian withdrawal, but it did not cause it.

¶4. (C/NF) When asked for his political plans, Aoun said that he would propose some laws in parliament against the Constitutional Council. Regarding former President Elias Hrawi's impending death (which occurred later in the day on July 7), Aoun said that Hrawi's brother-in-law had visited him that morning. Aoun acknowledged that he had past conflicts with Hrawi, such as fighting on opposing sides during Aoun's "War of Liberation" in 1989-1990 and an Aoun defamation lawsuit in 2002 after Hrawi accused him of embezzlement. Despite the fact that Hrawi is perceived to have given the green light to bomb Aoun out of Baabda Palace, Aoun said he planned to send flowers to the Hrawi family and a representative to Hrawi's funeral. "All that is history...social relations are different from politics," he said.

¶5. (C/NF) Regarding the national dialogue, Aoun suggested that Hizballah was sincere in its pledge to keep the Blue Line quiet during the ongoing Israeli military operation in Gaza. Aoun proudly pointed out that since his agreement with

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Hizballah, there has been only one "accident" along the Blue Line, referring to the rocket launch into Israel on the morning of May 28 and the resulting fighting. The Ambassador asked if Hizballah would facilitate a joint planning unit between UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces, and an increase in the Joint Security Force to its advertised level of 1,000 personnel. Aoun and Bassil replied that they had not discussed this with Hizballah, but promised to raise the issue the next time they meet.

¶6. (C/NF) Aoun expected the next national dialogue session, slated for late July, to define Lebanon's national defense strategy in regard to Hizballah's arms. If the circumstances no longer exist to justify Hizballah's arms, then "they are finished." If the dialogue participants decide that Hizballah's arms are still needed, then the dialogue must leave it to the army and Hizballah to coordinate their strategy. The soldiers should define cooperation with Hizballah. Aoun expected this process to take time; it certainly won't be resolved this summer.

¶7. (C/NF) The Ambassador asked Aoun what he would do about removing Palestinian arms outside the refugee camps, a decision already reached by the dialogue, if he were president. Aoun replied that he would simply delegate the power to the army commander. He agreed with Prime Minister Siniora's logic that an improvement in the humanitarian conditions in the camps would be a useful precursor to sending the army into Naameh and Sultan Yaccoub, which are major sites of the armed Palestinian rejectionists. Aoun speculated that although Hizballah might protest an army raid into the armed Palestinian bases, it would not take any physical action to interfere.

HIZBALLAH DENIES ANY
KNOWLEDGE OF KLOTZ CASE

¶8. (C/NF) The Ambassador asked about Aoun's progress in influencing Hizballah to help on the Klotz child custody

case. Bassil said that he discussed the issue last week with several Hizballah officials including Nawwaf Musawi and Abou Zeinab. He also inquired with the head of the Baalbeck municipality. Bassil said that no one in Hizballah or Baalbeck had ever heard of the Klotz case. They said they had no information. Bassil suspected that the GOL had not even asked Hizballah about the case as they promised they would. Bassil claimed he told Hizballah that this was not a good enough answer, as Hizballah should get information about the child. Hizballah officials told Bassil that they are not involved in the matter, and they would not interfere with the GOL in this case. (Comment: If the GOL has not raised the Klotz case with Baalbeck officials or even Hizballah after all of our pushing -- including from the Secretary -- it is truly shameful. But we suspect that Bassil and Aoun might again be too credulous in accepting Hizballah statements at face value. In any case, if Aoun and Bassil do produce Klotz for us, we will give them full credit. End comment.) FELTMAN